

# Communing with the Pilgrim Past on Clark's Island



*Searching for a place to settle in the New World, a delegation of Pilgrims landed on Clark's Island 376 years ago.*

Photos Courtesy of the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society

By Theresa Keefe

**W**ith so much in nature changing these days, there are few places left to enjoy our surroundings the way our ancestors did hundreds of years ago.

As Duxbury residents, however, we benefit not only from our historical past but from our position on the coast, which, with a short boat ride across the bay, grants us one of these rare sites.

Complete with wooded paths to explore and a refreshing lack of civilization, Clark's Island boasts of our local history with its primitive state. It still resembles the island the Pilgrims landed on 376 years ago.

With the Mayflower anchored in Provincetown, several Pilgrims and crew members set out in their shallop — a smaller version of the ship — in search of

freezing to death on their dismantled vessel. There they set up camp.

Because they needed repairs before they shoved off in search of a suitable place to bring the Mayflower, the crew remained on Clark's Island for a couple of days, resting from their work on the Sabbath. On that day, the men headed to the top of the island and, at Election Rock, celebrated their first service of thanksgiving in the New World.

Today, the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society owns the island in trust. They inherited it in 1969 from Sarah Wingate Taylor, teacher, poet, Pilgrim heritage enthusiast and a member of the Watson family, proprietors of Clark's Island from 1690.

The society, run almost entirely by volunteers, maintains the traditions of the island through its Sarah Wingate Taylor



*The service at Election Rock is a highlight of the annual Clark's Island Picnic.*

lecture series and the annual picnic and commemorative service on Clark's Island. This year's picnic is Sunday.

The society encourages residents to pack their lunches, bathing suits and families to join the fleet of rowboats, sailboats and schooners heading over to Clark's Island from noon to 4 p.m. for an outdoor history lesson and family event that can't be missed.

"Everybody comes in their own boat and lands at the island's little rickety dock," said former Duxbury resident Judie Taylor, who for 22 years lived on Standish Shore in a house that faced Clark's Island across the bay. "Pilgrims arrive in their shallop and teach the kids

all sorts of old-fashioned games, and people go swimming. It's great."

The picnic, which is open to everybody, usually includes the Plimoth Plantation Pilgrims, who arrive afloat in their shallop to participate in the event.

"This year, the Pilgrims can't come," said Duxbury resident Ninky Savage. "It's kind of a disappointment — but most peo-

a New World site where the colonists could settle. Sailing up the north shore of Cape Cod, the 10 Pilgrims and eight crew members ran into a wind storm that left their mast and rudder in ruins as they frantically searched for a place to land.

Although they feared an Indian attack, the crew ~~was led by the ship's mate, John~~ Clarke — trudged through the shallow water and onto the nearby island to avoid



*Their shallop in need of repair, they set up camp on the island.*

ple come out just because it's a fun day to visit the island. It's so peaceful."

Following the picnic on the lawn of Cedarfield, the island's second-oldest house, which was deeded to the Rural and Historical Society through Sarah Wingate Taylor's Pilgrim Rock Foundation, the group proceeds up the woodsy path to Election Rock. There they reenact the service the men from the Mayflower's shallop held on that cold December day in 1620.

Savage, whose familiarity with the island is partially due to the 12-year Cedarfield renovation project she shares with her husband, Peter, hopes people will head out to the island for the picnic despite the lack of Pilgrims. She encourages those without boats to call Alexandra Earle at the Rural and Historical Society to make arrangements.

"They really try to get everyone out there," Savage said. "If you call in advance, they will try to get people on boats to the island by volunteers."

The picnic is one of the town's most successful annual events, attracting several hundred residents each summer.

"It's grown over the years," said Earle, the society's executive director. "People call all year: 'When's it going to be? When's it going to be?'"

Although the island receives the majority of its visitors on the day of the picnic, its wooded terrain remains open all year for residents to explore, hike through the woods and get a look at the inscription carved on Election Rock: "On the Seventh Day, Wee Rested," taken from Governor Bradford's journal describing that first Sunday. But the picnic proves to be a great way to take in the island and everything it has to offer.

Said Taylor, who has visited Clark's Island a dozen or so times over the years, "I don't ever remember a bad day out there."